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Adaptation Processes in Chinese: Word Formation

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short title: Adaptation Processes in Chinese

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The Chinese are lenders, not borrowers. With the notable exceptions of Buddhism and Marxism, their civilization has remained remarkably free of foreign influence, while Chinese civilization has had marked impact on that of its neighbours. The traditional Chinese reaction to altered circumstances is to adapt what already exists rather than to borrow from elsewhere. For example, beginning with the Opium War China suffered one heavy defeat after another at the hands of the Western powers. The Chinese response to these defeats was to undertake a self-strengthening movement the essence of which, as formulated in the 1890's by the reform politician Zhang Zhidong, was this:

(1)

中	學	爲	體	西	學	爲
zhōng	xué	wéi	tǐ	xī	xué	wéi
Chinese	learning	be	body, essentials	Western	learning	be

用 .

yòng

use, apply

"Chinese learning for the essential principles, Western learning for the practical application."

This ability of the Chinese of not essentially changing their own behaviour, attitudes, their own system of values, and their ways of communication by borrowing from abroad, but rather to adapt, to modify the already existing aspects of their own life to make them more suitable to new circumstances and new social needs, is also effective in the Chinese language. Not being borrowers the Chinese, compared to other peoples, have only very few loan words in their language. There are Buddhist terms such as

(2) 菩薩
pú sà

short for

(3) 菩提薩埵
pú tí sà duǒ

which is the Bōdhisatva - he whose essense is intelligence. There are also some Western words like

(4) 鴉片
yā piàn

which is English "opium", a drug, as is known from Chinese history, that was forced by the British upon the Chinese.
Under the influence of the October Revolution another set of words were introduced. Some examples are:

(5) 苏维埃
Sū wéi āi (Soviet)

and

(6) 布尔什维克
bù ěr shí wéi kè (Bolshevik).

Only a few loanwords that came into Chinese from Western languages in this century have survived such as, for instance,

(7) 盘尼西林
pán ní xī lín (penicillin)

which was recently replaced, however, by a genuine Chinese expression:

(8) 青霉素
qīng méisù.
blue toxin

(9) 坦克

tǎn kè (tank, armoured carrier)

When consulting the big "English - Chinese Dictionary of Technology", which has about 75,000 items, there are only very few loan-words like tǎnkè. The large amount of "international loan-words" that we have in the Western world were all adapted to a Chinese pattern.

(10) 激 光 发 射 机

jī guāng fā shè jī

swash, arouse, stimulate | light, ray | send out, emit | launch | machine, engine

laser

launch, project, shoot, transmit

transmitter

laser transmitter

(11) 适 应 过 程

shì yìng guò chéng

fit, suitable | answer, respond to | cross, pass | rule, procedure

suit, adapt, fit

process, course

adaptation process

When translating a text from a Western language we find almost no loan words in it, all the foreign contents are reformulated in a typically Chinese way. Compare for example the following definition of "Arbeitskraft" (labour power) that Karl Marx gave in his "Das Kapital", where in the English version we find a lot of loan words of Latin-French orign, while the Chinese text exclusively uses its own word-roots:

German original:

"Unter Arbeitskraft oder Arbeitsvermögen verstehen wir den Inbegriff der physischen und geistigen Fähigkeiten, die in der Leiblichkeit, der lebendigen Persönlichkeit eines Menschen existieren und die er in Bewegung setzt, sooft er Gebrauchswerte irgendeiner Art produziert."

(Karl Marx: Das Kapital I, p. 181)

English translation:

"By labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description."

Karl Marx: The Capital I, p. 164)

We can make a test and leave out all the loan-words of the English text. What would remain is a skeleton of grammatical function words, the only exception being the word "understood":

"By ... ... or ... for ... is to be understood the ... of those ... and ... ... in a ... being, which he ... whenever he ... a ... ... of any ... ."

This demonstrates that even all the decisive concepts in this text are represented by loan-words.
Now compare this to the Chinese version, where all the word building material is Chinese:

(12) 我 们 把 劳 动 力 或

wǒ men bǎ láo dòng lì huò

we (particle for object) labour power or

劳 动 能 力 , 理 解 为

láo dòng néng lì lǐ jiě wéi

labour capacity understand be

人 的 身 体 即 活 的

rén de shēn tǐ jí huó de

man (particle for attribute) body namely living, lively (...)

人 体 中 存 在 的 、

rén tǐ zhōng cún zài de

man(s) body within exist (...)

每 当 人 生 产 某 种

měi dāng rén shēng chǎn mǒu zhǒng

whenever man produce certain kind of, "of any description"

使 用 价 值 时 就

shǐ yòng jià zhí shí jiù

use value time, when... then

运	用	的	体	力	和	智
yùn	*yòng*	*de*	*tǐ*	*lì*	*hé*	*zhì*
utilize, apply, "exercise"		(...)	bodily physical	strength, power, "capabilities"	and	mental

力	的	总	和 。
lì	*de*	*zǒng*	*hé*
strength, power, "capabilities" (...)		sum, total, "aggregate"	(Chinese translation of "Das Kapital")

How is it that the Chinese rendition of a Western text can do without loanwords?

To describe some of the most important morphological and semantic features let us consider the key words of the final sentence of the above quote.

(13) 劳动力
láodòng - lì ("labour-power")

(14) 劳动能力
láodòng - nénglì ("capacity for labour")

(15) 体力
tǐlì ("physical capabilities")

(16) 智力
zhìlì ("mental capabilities")

Modern Chinese is no longer a monosyllabic language as ancient Chinese largely was. More than 80 percent of the words in a contemporary text of public language use consist of compound words having two or more morphemes, almost always

represented by as many syllables and characters. In general, the equation of one morpheme : one syllable : one character is valid in Chinese. Moreover, there is the tendency to keep the outer structure of the lexical units, namely of the Chinese characters. They are individual entities with graphemic, morphological phonological and semantic pecularities of their own, which are put into new contexts to make them suitable for new communication needs. In modern written Chinese the character is the basic building block of larger entities, that is, compounds, syntagmas, phrases, sentences, and texts.

(17) In our four example words we find as such a basic unit the character 力 lì, which means today, "strength, power, force". From the times of the first written documents until today we find this character put into the most different kinds of con-

(18) texts. In the 书经, Shujing, for example, which is the first Chinese work on history, parts of which date back to a time before Confucius, we find:

(19)

今	商	王	受	力	行	無
jīn	Shāng	wáng	Shòu	lì	xíng	wú
now	Shang	king	Shou	strength,	persue	without,

度 。 〔書經 "Shujing"〕

dù

law,

"Now Show, the king of Shang, with strength persues his lawless way."

(transl. Legge vol. III, p. 290)

(20) One of the modern uses of 力, lì, is as a technical term of physics:

(21)

荷	载	作	用	在	梁	上
hè	*zài*	*zuò*	*yong*	*zài*	*liáng*	*shang*
load		act on, affect, effect		on	beam	upon (post-position)

的	力	
de	*li*	"the force of the load of the beam"
(...)	strength, power, force	

(22) In both examples the character 力, lì, is used as a single word, but it is put into two very different contexts. A second feature is to integrate characters into other characters as semantic radicals.

(23) We find here in our examples the integrative force of the character 力 lì within the two complex characters:

(24) 勞 (simplified: 劳) *láo:* work, labour; to toil, to fatigue

(25) 動 (simplified: 动) *dòng:* to move, to take action, exercise.

(26) According to the Morohashi Dai Kan-Wa Ji-ten (the 13 volume Chinese-Japanese Dictionary) the character 力, lì, is the semantic radical of more than 200 compound characters,

(27) many of which are very productive in modern word formation processes. Chinese has 214 semantic radicals like 力, lì, some however less productive, from which there are built more than 60,000 compound characters (= root words). The

(28) 60,000 single character words like 劳, láo, are used to form

(29) hundreds of thousands of compound words, as 劳动, láodòng, ("labour").

(30) To express the modern term "labour-power" 力, lì, is used

(31) in combination with the compound word 劳动, láodòng, which

(32) itself contains 力, lì, as semantic radicals in both of its constituents.

Now, many of the compound words which we find in the modern language already have a very long history. The combination

(33) 劳动, láodòng, for instance, has been in existence since the

(34) fourth century B.C. In the Taoist text of Zhuangzi (chapter 讓王 "Giving away a Throne") it is said:

Rang wang

(35)

春	耕	種	形	足	以
chūn	gēng	zhòng	xíng	zú	yǐ
spring	plow	plant	body	enough	so that

勞 動。〔莊子．讓王〕

láo dòng "Zhuangzi"

labour, work; move, exercise

"In spring I plow and plant - this gives my body the labor and exercise it needs."

(transl. Watson, p. 310)

In the Middle Ages the Japanese borrowed the compound word from the Chinese, where, under the influence of modern Western science, it got its final use as "manual labour, work."

(36) (In modern Japanese writing it is 労働, pronounced /rōdō/) Then, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Chinese integrated the modern Japanese word into their own system, as they did with a lot of other words such as

(37) 革命

gémìng ("revolution")

(38) 文化
wénhuà ("culture")

(39) 文学
wénxué ("literature")

(40) 社会
shèhuì ("society"),

all being old Chinese words that were reintegrated into the Chinese language system after they had been modernized by the Japanese. This is another example of what I cited at the beginning of thispaper, namely the Chinese attitude "Chinese learning for the essential principles, Western learning for the practical application." For the Chinese "the West"includes Japan, even though it is located to the east of China. From what I have said so far, one might get the impression that all these adaptation processes in Chinese take place on the level of the learned or literary language, that it has little to do with the vernacular language. But there is a very important and very effective pattern in the Chinese way of adapting the "essential principles"of the Chinese language to fulfill the growing and changing needs of the society. Instead of borrowing foreign words the typical adaptation pattern of the Chinese is to use lexical metaphors.

Metaphors in a general sense are names applied to objects to which they literally are not applicable (cf. Concise Oxford Dictionary, p. 763), implying a comparison. We have to distinguish two kinds of metaphors - stylistic metaphors which are used to intensify the meaning in figurative speech, e. g., when we speak of "a glaring error", or when we find in a sentence of Shakespeare, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." (Shakespeare, J. Caesar IV, 3). In distinction to stylistic metaphors we speak of lexical metaphors when in the

course of history the figurative use of a linguistic unit has reached a certain steadiness and has become an integrated part of the lexical system. Thus talking about "a farm hand" or "the foot of a mountain" is no longer figurative in the sense of stylistics, but it is a normal way of designating a farm labourer or the lower part of a mountain.

When adapting vernacular languages to the communicative needs of modern societies lexical metaphors play a major role by transferring expressions of the vernacular language into a nomenclature, that is, into a system of names used in a particular science or art. Here the lexical metaphor is not the result of a dying stylistic metaphor, but the outcome of a transfer in language use. Take for example the English word "wave", a noun derived from the verb "to wave" meaning "to move up and down or back and forth in a curving or undulating motion" (Webster, p. 2070). As a lexical metaphor the noun "wave" has become a technical term of physics where it designates "any of the series of advancing impulses set up by a vibration, pulsation, or disturbance in air or some other medium, as in the transmission of heat, light, sound, etc." (Webster, p. 2070). In the following I will discuss, from an historical point of view, an example of how Chinese lexical metaphors work to fulfill the needs of a developing society and the developing communicative needs of a changing society.

(44) As has been pointed out above the simple Chinese character 力, lì, today means "strength, power, force". Its ancient phonetic form has been reconstructed as */liə k/, compare Cantonese lik, Japanese riki, ryoku, Korean ryŏk, Vietnamese lực. According to Bernhard Karlgrens "Grammata Serica Recensa" (No. 928) the character as found on an early Zhou inscription from almost 3.000 years ago seems to depict an arm with a hand, its early

(42) (43) form . Maybe the variant form shows a hand with a sinew (B. Karlgren, Analytic Dictionary, p. 172). It is evident that already in the earliest times the originally concrete meaning "muscular arm, powerful hand" was transferred to designate persons having such hands and then to describe the qualities of such persons as having "strength". This transfer of meaning was due to a developing communicative need in early Chinese society to have names not only for concrete objects and persons but also for their qualities, features, etc. The progressive division of labour developed the growing need of an increasing differentiation in the world-outlook and in the system of designations. In the Book of Odes, a collection of about 300 songs, some of which might be more than 3000 years old, we find already a differetiated use of the (44) character 力, lì, the concrete meaning of the "muscular arm, powerful hand" being transferred to at least three different entities:

(45) First: 力, lì, as a quality of man,

(46) as for example in the Ode 簡兮, Jian fen, that is maybe the song of a young lady admiring a man with the words:

(47)

有	力	如	虎 。	〔詩經．簡兮〕
yǒu	lì	rú	hǔ	"Shijing"
have	strength	like	tiger	

"He has strength like a tiger."

(transl. Karlgren, No. 38)

The beginning of that ode which contains our sentence, is:

"Oh great, great! They are just going to perform the great dance;
when the sun is just at the zenith, he is at the uppermost place at the front.
The tall man is very great, he performs the great dance in the prince's courtyard;

he has strength like a tiger, he holds (chariot) reins as if they were silk strings ..." (l. c.)

Here it would still make sense to refer to the earliest concrete meaning of the word as "he has muscular limbs like a tiger".

(48) Secondly: 力, lì, as the action of man.

(49) The ode 正月, Zheng yue, begins with an outcry:

"In the first month there is ample hoar-frost;
my heart is grieved and pained; the false speeches
of the people also greatly (...) make it worse;
I think of how I am alone,
the grief of my heart is very great;
alas for my cares, I am painfully grieved so that
I am sick ..." (transl. Karlgren, No. 192)

Verse seven continues thus:

"Look at that field on the slope,
luxuriant is its straightrising (grain),
Heaven shakes me, but it does not crush me,
they (...) try to emulate me, but they do not
attain to me (...);
they have seized me, enemy-fashion, and yet they
cannot force me ..." (l. c.)

In this last sentence

(50)

亦	不	我	力 .	〔詩經.正月〕
yì	bù	wǒ	lì	"Shijing"
and, yet	not	I, me	force	

"and yet they cannot force me"
(transl. Karlgren, No. 192)

(51) we find the verbal use of 力, lì, describing the action of using force.

(52) Thirdly: 力, lì, as an abstract entity,

for instance in the ode 蕩 Dang. King Wen, the founder

(53) of the Zhou dynasty, is cited here as having said,

"Alas! Alas, you Yin-Shang! Those (men) are refractory,
they are (crushing and subduing =) oppressive,
but they are in official positions, they are in the services;
Heaven (sent down =) gave them a reckless disposition,
but you raise them and give them power ..."
(transl. Karlgren, No. 255)

In the phrase

(54) 女 興 是 力 。 〔詩經·蕩〕

nǚ xīng shì lì "Shijing"

you raise this (give) power

"You raise them and give them power." (transl. Karlgren No. 255)

(55) the meaning of 力 lì is "to give power to somebody".

(56) These three modifications the word 力, lì, underwent have something in common. In all three cases the transfer did not go beyond the limits of the vernacular language. The language of the Book of Odes as handed down to our days was the everyday language of the people or at least very close to it. Lexical metaphors were in principle understood by everybody; they were not yet integrated into a nomenclature, being connected with a specified knowledge of a science or an art.

Things in China changed fundamentally with the rise of feudalism. The division of labour reached a very high form of development with the beginning of the Chun-Qiu-Zhanguo-Period, (8th until 3rd centuries B. C.), which was reflected in the division of highly specified language usages. Looking, for example, at the

(57) text by 孟子, Mengzi, a Confucian philosopher of the early 3rd century B. C., we see a split in the meaning

(58) of individual words such as 力, lì.

On the one hand, the vernacular meaning was kept or developed within the realm of the language of everyday life, on the other hand, new lexical metaphors were used

to fulfill the higher communicative needs of specified new activities of human beings, like economics and the art of war.

(59) In the book 孟子, Mengzi, we find for example the vernacular meaning of
(60) 力, lì, "strength" as in

(61)

吾	力	足	以	舉	百	鈞
wú	lì	zú	yǐ	jǔ	bǎi	jūn
my	strength	enough	so that	lift	hundred	30 catties

而	不	足	以	舉	一	羽 。
ér	bù	zú	yǐ	jǔ	yī	yǔ
but	not	enough	so that	lift	one	feather

〔孟子. Mengzi〕

"My strength is sufficient to lift three thousand catties, but it is not sufficient to lift one feather."

(transl. Legge, p. 454)

(62) One of the modifications 力, lì, acquired in the book
(63) 孟子, Mengzi, was the development of the opposition:

(64) 力, lì : physical strength,

(65) 心, xīn : heart, that was in ancient China regarded as the centre of thoughts, feelings, wishes.

Consider the following example:

(66)

以	力	服	人	者	非	心
yǐ	lì	fú	rén	zhě	fēi	xīn
take	force	subdue	man	(particle for nouns)	be not	heart

服	也。	〔孟子. Mengzi〕
fú	yě	
subdue	(final particle)	

"When one by (physical) force subdues men, they do not submit to him in heart."

(transl. Legge, p. 540)

(67)
(68)

This opposition of 力, lì, and 心, xīn, was then applied to the fields of economics. As lexical metaphors they expressed the division of labour into physical (lì) and mental labour (xīn):

(69)

或	劳	心	或	劳	力
huò	láo	xīn	huò	láo	lì
some	labour	heart	some	labour	strength

"Some labor with their minds,
some labor with their strength."
(transl. Legge, p. 627)

〔孟子 · Mengzi〕

Mengzi quotes from an economic treatise which continues as follows.

"Those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others support them; those who govern others are supported by

them." "This", so concludes Mengzi, "is a principle universally recognized." (transl. Legge, p. 627)

Already in the 4th century B. C., we have the word lì as an economic term. And there is still another lexical-metaphorical use of this word in the book of Mengzi. In the seventh chapter he deals with the different kinds of taxes that people had to pay: the tax of cloth and silk in the summer, that of grain after harvest, and that of personal service or corvée in the winter, called

(70)

力	役	之	征	〔孟子 Mengzi〕
lì	yì	zhī	zhēng	
strength, serve		ATTRIB.	taxes	

"the exactions of ... personal service"
(transl. Legge, p. 997)

The word lì as a lexical metaphor signifies here a special kind of surplus-labour.

Around the beginning of the 4th century B. C. there was another transfer of the vernacular word lì to nomenclature, namely to the technical terms of the art of war. In the Sunzi bingfa (Sunzi on the Art of War) the word lì means among other things the "Fighting strength", the "combat effectiveness of an army", that is mentioned together with

(71)

氣 qì, here the "fighting energy", "fighting spirits of the troops", for example in the maxim,

(72)

併	氣	積	力	〔孫子兵法〕
bìng	qì	jī	lì	
together, concentrate	spirit, energy	collect, hoard	strength	"Sunzi bingfa"

"Concentrate your energy and hoard your strength."
(transl. Giles, p. 124)

The economic and military use of lì are only two examples of how, by using lexical metaphors, the vernacular language was adapted to new communicative needs in early Chinese society. And what is still more important: This pattern has been kept until now. If we had the time to go through Chinese history at greater length, we could see how this adaptation process went on and on until modern times. Today, too, the Chinese use lexical metaphors to fulfill new communicative needs that develop under the influence from abroad - a situation where most languages of the world use loan-words.

To conclude, I would like to illustrate

(73) the modern usage of the word 力, lì,

and its manifold adaptative capacity

In modern economics we have words like the above mentioned

(74) 劳 动 力 "labour-power"

láodòng-lì

Others are

(75) 脑 力 劳 动 "mental work"

nǎolì-láodòng

(76) 体 力 劳 动 "physical work"

tǐlì-láodòng

(77) 生 产 力 "productive forces"

shēngchán-lì

(78) 土 地 肥 力 "fertility of soil" (as a factor of productivity of labour)

tǔdì-féilì

In modern military sciences, lì has gained a very large field of adaptation, for example

(79) 兵 力 "military strength", "military capability"

bīnglì

(80) 武 力 "military force", "force of arms"

wǔlì

(81) 武 装 力 量 "armed forces"

wǔzhuāng-lìliàng

(82) In physics, a whole discipline (Chinese 学 xué) has acqired the name of lì:

(83) 力 学 "mechanics"

lìxué

We find the

(84) 水 力 "hydraulic power"

shuǐlì

(85) 压 力 计 "pressure meter"

yālìjì

(86) 电 力 "electric power"

diànlì

(87) 原 子 动 力 船 "atomic-powered ship"

yuánzi-dònglì-chuán

In musicology,

(88) 力 度

lìdù

refers to dynamics, i. e. the variation and gradation of volume as, for example, "piano," "fortissimo," "crescendo."

In linguistics also the word lì helps to build up a terminology. In the Chinese translation of the "Dictionary of Language and Linguistics" by R.R.K. Hartmann and F.C. Stork we find several terms containig lì, as for example

(89) 听 力 图 "audiogram"

tīnglìtú

Yet another example is

(90) 激发力 "evocative"

jīfā-lì

which is the power of a word or phrase to cause an emotional reaction in the hearer or reader by its ameliorative or pejorative connotations.

To describe the current state of affairs, one could say that China, for so long a lender but not a borrower, is now neither a lender nor a borrower in terms of language. The days of China's cultural and linguistic prestige or even domination of its neighbours (Korea, Japan, Vietnam) are over. However, the days when China was dominated by the imperialist powers are also past. This does not mean that China has returned to its state of "splendid isolation." On the contrary, much is changing in China as Chinese society has become more open to the rest of the world during the last years. But the important point is that this changing and opening takes place in a manner that is in perfect agreement with Chinese tradition. The pattern of word-formation --namely to use native material to adapt to changed circumstances-- may be seen as a part of a larger cultural pattern: to borrow if necessary, but to ensure that one act of borrowing does not bring with it still other aspects of the foreign culture, not even the name of the borrowed concept. And that means to make it Chinese in form and content. The Chinese expression for this is

(91) 中国化 Zhōngguóhuà to make something Chinese in form and character, to sinicize.

What the Chinese are doing today is borrow Western concepts, but before a concept can enter the language system, its foreign name must be stripped away - it must be cleansed of all possible foreign influence and made Chinese in form and character (in the double sense of the word).

Chinese vernacular may thus be seen as a source of material for linguistic adaptation as a means of modernization.

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(1) 中 学 为 体 西 学 为 用

(2) 菩 萨

(3) 菩 提 萨 埵

(4) 鸦 片

(5) 苏 维 埃

(6) 布 尔 什 维 克

(7) 盘 尼 西 林

(8) 青 毒素

(9) 坦 克

(10) 激 光 发 射 机

(11) 适 应 过 程

(12) 我们把劳动力或

劳动能力理解为

人的身体即活的

人体中存在的

每当人生产某种

使用价值时就

运用的体力和智

力的总和

(13) 劳动力

(14) 劳动能力

(15) 体力

(16) 智力

(17) 力

(18) 书经

(19) 今 商 王 受 力 行 无 度 （书经）
"Shujing"

(20) 力

(21) 荷载 作用 在 梁 上 的 力

(22) 力

(23) 力

(24) 勞 劳

(25) 勳 动

(26) 力

(27) 力

(28) 劳

(29) 劳动

(30) 力

(31) 劳动

(32) 力

(33) 劳动

(34) 让王

(35) 春 耕 种 形 足 以 劳 动 (庄子 让王)

(36) 勞 働

(37) 革命

(38) 文化

(39) 文学

(40) 社会

(41) 力

(42)

(43)

(44) 力

(45) 力

(46) 简分

(47) 有 力 如 虎 (诗经 简分)

(48) 力

(49) 正月

(50) 亦 不 我 力 (诗经 正月)

(51) 力

(52) 力

(53) 荡

(54) 汝 兴 是 力 (诗经·荡)

(55) 力

(56) 力

(57) 孟子

(58) 力

(59) 孟子

(60) 力

(61) 吾力足以举百钧而不足以举一羽

(孟子)

(62) 力

(63) 孟子

(64) 力

(65) 心

(66) 以力服人者非心服也 (孟子)

(67), (68) 力 心

(69) 或劳心或劳力 (孟子)

(70) 力 役 之 征 (孟子)

(71) 气

(72) 并 气 积 力 (孙子兵法)

(73) 力

(74) 劳动力

(75) 脑力 劳动

(76) 体力 劳动

(77) 生产力

(78) 土地 肥力

(79) 兵力

(80) 武力

(81) 武装 力量

(82) 学

(83) 力学

(84) 水力

(85) 压力计

(86) 电力

(87) 原子 动力 船

(88) 力度

(89) 听力图

(90) 激发力

(91) 中国化